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General Adaptation and Translation Notes

OECD's PISA-basted test for Schools

The PISA-based Test for Schools (PBTS) is a digital assessment intended to help school leaders understand their 15-year-old students' abilities to think critically and apply their knowledge creatively in novel contexts.

Read more about **OECD's page on PISA based test for schools**

What you need

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Step-by-step

Translation notes and item-specific translation and adaptation guidelines are included in the Excel spreadsheets provided to the translators. These notes are provided in English only. Their purpose is to guide translators on specific issues. We have provided some additional instructions for adapting International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels in Appendix A.

Never adapt the format of an item

Items that are open-ended in the source version should never be turned into multiple-choice items in your national version, or vice-versa. Never change the order or the content of headings of responses presented as columns in tables. For example, do NOT invert “Yes/No” or “True/False” categories into “No/Yes” or “False/True”.

Do not include explanatory notes nor additional instructions

In some cases, you may be tempted to add a footnote or a parenthetical explanation to provide the meaning of a particularly difficult word. Please note that such adaptations should be avoided and, if they are deemed unavoidable, they must be submitted for approval.

Similarly, avoid adding extra instructions (e.g. to explain where the students should write their answers, or to indicate that two answers are requested).

Names of persons and locations can usually be adapted

In most of the items, you can use names and locations that are familiar to the students in your country. We recommend you use national names that start with the same initial letter as in the source version and that represent the same gender as in source, as the materials have been designed to be gender-neutral in that characters of both genders appear in the materials equally. Having the same initial letters as the source version will also help avoid errors when translating complex lists of names, or distracters in multiple choice questions.

Check that adaptations are consistently applied

It often happens that translators enter adaptations in an inconsistent way. If you change a proper noun or the name of a currency, do not forget to do it every time these terms appear in the text or in the items, or in any illustration accompanying the text. If decimal commas need to be used in your national version rather than decimal periods, please check all decimal numbers in your materials.

Think of possible other adaptations that may be needed in your country

The most common adaptations are known by the teams responsible for the development of international tests. Most of them will be described in the item-specific translation/adaptation guidelines. However, not everything can be foreseen. Your team of translators may be confronted with new problems requiring deviations from the source versions.

- For example, in countries where the school week goes from Sunday to Thursday, it would be necessary to modify the headings of a possible school timetable, which would go from Monday to Friday in the source version. Of course, one must be careful that this modification does not affect the item(s) in any way.
- In some items, we ask about levels of education or degrees received. Those may need adaptation in terms of the names used. Translators should take care they understand what the original item says and pick the term that most closely matches the original item.

Keep in mind that some respondents will misunderstand anything that can be misunderstood

The smallest ambiguity in the formulation of a question can make the interpretation of the answers difficult. Try to anticipate problems that could arise in your country, and to formulate the question in a way that will prevent them. Pay attention to the vocabulary and the turn of phrase. Remember that the Student Questionnaire must be well understood even by those students whose reading skills are poor.

English is probably one of the most flexible languages in the world for the construction of interrogative sentences. Any English adjective or adverb can be used as a basis for an interrogatory (“How old…?”, “How strong…?”, “How valuable…?”, “How often…?”, “How likely…?”, and so on), while many other languages have a much more limited list of interrogative words or expressions.

In addition, the English syntax allows interrogative expressions to be embedded in other interrogative phrases (e.g. “Which of the following factors determine whether students are admitted to your school?”), while these complex expressions are not always possible in other languages.

Please do your best to keep the wording of question stems as simple and fluent as possible in your national language. If needed, you may want to split very complex questions into two different sentences, rather than producing a too literal translation, which might be confusing or difficult to understand for the respondent.

Consistent translations for recurring elements

For the sake of consistency across questionnaires, it may help to list the instructions that appear several times in the questionnaire (such as “Please tick only one box”, “Please tick all that apply”, “Please select one response in each row” or “Please select one response”) so these can be re-used and kept consistent. The system re-uses answer categories so these only have to be translated once.

Scales

Imperfect translation of answer categories (like “Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree” or “Not at all, Very little, To some extent, A lot”) can have considerable impact on the responses. Please be particularly careful in finding words or expressions that are as equivalent and equidistant as possible to those in the source version.

When translating questions that ask the respondent how often something happens (at home, or at school, or in the classroom), avoid including in the translation of the various items any indication of frequency. For example, in a question where the answer categories are “Never, In some lessons, In most lessons”, do not add in the items any time adverbs or adjectives, such as in “Students often spend time in laboratories” or “There is constant noise and disorder in my class” or “My teachers would regularly help the students who need it”).

Similarly, in “How much…?” questions, avoid adding in the wording of the items any reference to quantity. For example, in a question where the answer categories are “Not at all/Very little/To some extent/A lot”, avoid adding quantitative expressions in the items, such as “Does your school have huge rates of students’ absenteeism?”

In the same order of ideas, any overt grammatical negation should be avoided in the wording of items that have answer categories containing negative expressions, such as “Yes/No”, or “Not at all ….A lot”, or “Strongly agree… Strongly disagree”. For example, a Likert-type item such as “Learning advanced science topics would be difficult for me (Strongly agree… Strongly disagree)” might confuse students if it were translated into “Learning advanced science topics would not be easy for me” in your national version.

When answering questionnaire items that ask for self-reports, many respondents tend to conform to what they think are socially ‘acceptable’ or ‘desirable’ positions (i.e., they tend to report more ‘positive’ characteristics than what the real characteristics actually are).

This pattern is partly dependent on the ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ connotations of the vocabulary used in the items. Note that items containing particularly ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ words (e.g. “In our school, teachers work with enthusiasm”; “School buildings are inadequate”) are more sensitive than others to this kind of artefact. When translating, please try to choose words that are as equivalent as possible in terms of ‘positive’, ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’ connotations.

In order to help translators and National Centres, all terms and expressions that usually require adaptation appear in the source version between <angle brackets>, with references to explanations and translation notes that follow. Please make sure that all these terms are translated into expressions, which are actually used by students and teachers in your country – rather than into technical terms used only by specialists – and which are adapted to your education system.

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